

MINUTES
CHIEF OF ENGINEERS' ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G St., N.W., Washington, DC
24 April 2001

1. The meeting was called to order by LTG Robert Flowers, Chief of Engineers, at 1319 hours, 24 April 2001. The following Board members were present:
 - Ms. Virginia Wetherell
 - Dr. Fred Weinmann
 - Dr. Paul Sandifer
 - Ms. Huali Chai, Esq.
 - Dr. Paul E. Hosier

Also present were three nominees for the Board, Dr. Michael J. Donahue, Dr. Theodore Hullar, and Dr. Jeffrey Mount. In addition to LTG Flowers, Corps of Engineers general officers or Senior Executive Service members attending were MG Hans Van Winkle, Director of Civil Works; Mr. Fred Caver, Deputy Director of Civil Works; and Dr. Jim Johnson, Chief, Civil Works Planning and Policy Division.

2. **ROLE OF THE BOARD**

LTG Flowers asked members and nominees to offer views on how they see the Board's role. He stated that he would like to see the Board meet formally at least twice a year, but was open to a change in that frequency. He said he would like the next meeting to be at a USACE laboratory to showcase the Corps' research and development work.

Dr. Hullar suggested that two meetings a year might not be enough to support the Chief's agenda and allow Board members time to learn about the Corps. He suggested the Board help in getting the Nation to use the Corps to its maximum potential. He also saw a role for the Board in developing a synergy between the culture and values of the Corps and those of the academic community.

Dr. Donahue cited the work of the Great Lakes Commission in fostering cooperation among 8 States and 2 Canadian provinces, and said he sees a role for the Board in helping the Corps strengthen its partnerships and cooperative endeavors. He explained that the Great Lakes Commission can't be labeled as either an environmental or economic development organization; its focus is on sustainable development. He liked the idea of a meeting at a lab, but suggested the Board also hold on-site meetings where they can examine regional issues such as the Everglades, the Upper Mississippi River or the Great Lakes. He sees a need for the Corps to institutionalize the Chief's Vision and the good ideas generated by the Board.

Dr. Weinmann, a wetland ecologist who retired from the Environmental Protection Agency and previously worked for the Corps for a number of years, said the EAB needs to establish itself as a meaningful part of the Corps process; as most Districts are not familiar with it. He asked whether the Board would have an impact on National policy, and said he would prefer to impact something (i.e., a specific project) right now. He suggested that the Chief call an EAB meeting whenever a situation arises where he would benefit from Board input. **LTG**

Flowers suggested informal video conferences for such occasions – rather than trying to synchronize calendars, he could alert the Board to an issue, then hold a VTC. He said it would be hard for the Board not to be involved in policy, which is set by the Administration but where the Corps does much of the legwork. **Dr Weinmann** also cited a need for the Corps to follow through in design, construction and operation & maintenance, on commitments made during the planning process; the Corps has plenty of environmental expertise in planning, but not as much in design or construction. **LTG Flowers** pointed out that the Corps now operates under the Project Management Business Process (PMBP), where a manager stays on the project from the study through design and construction.

Ms. Wetherell pointed out that, whereas other Board members have scientific expertise, she brings the perspective of a State agency working with the Corps and seeing the relationship between her State (Florida) and the Corps improve over time. The Corps, she said, can now be considered an environmental agency, and much of the turnaround is a product of the personalities of State and Corps leaders and their willingness to work together. She would like the Board to promote successful models of collaborative approaches to watersheds. She also said that, given tight budgets at all levels, the Board can work with the Corps to eliminate duplicative process, such as the former requirement for Federal and State wetlands permits – Jacksonville District agreed that a State permit would meet the requirements under the Sec. 404 program. **LTG Flowers** noted that, in the Corps reorganization of 1997, all operational functions were assigned to districts, leaving divisions to function as regional business centers.

Dr. Hosier thanked the Chief for reviving the Board, but noted that previous meetings had devolved into “dog and pony shows” by Corps personnel, with the Board making recommendations that may or may not be acted upon. He pointed out that universities are constantly under observation by accreditation boards, and, although it can be a nuisance, such “looks inward” prompted by agencies asking hard questions have been very useful. Concerning meeting locations, he pointed out that Board members have varied backgrounds, and need to learn from field personnel about problems on the ground. He also asked about technology transfers from the laboratories to the users – the process now seems spotty. Finally, he suggested that the EAB serve as a sounding board and a public relations arm for the Corps when its projects and procedures are called into question.

Ms. Chai commented that IWR’s *National Dialogue* brochures (distributed to Board members prior to the meeting) with their 10 challenges showed goals similar to those of the Federal Western Water Policy Review Advisory Commission. One especially useful concept found in the brochures, she said, is holistic watershed management. The San Pablo Baylands, near San Francisco, could be a model for such an approach. There, the Corps, the State of California and others are collaborating to restore a degraded 900 square mile area. The Corps and the California Coastal Conservancy provided seed money and technical expertise, and local agencies and environmental groups suggested projects – local buy-in is essential to any collaborative effort. She would like to see the EAB function as a real advisory board whose ideas are truly considered, and believes that the Board should serve as a liaison with the public. She asked that the EAB members be permitted to advise on matters of policy as well as on technical environmental issues.

Dr. Mount suggested that EAB help bridge the gap between the Chief's Vision and action on the ground. As Corps missions change, the Board can advise on how those changes could be implemented. The Board could also help critique the Corps methodology- many in the environmental community have questions about current methods. He said that, by making the Board visible, the Corps reaches out to this community, and suggested district-level EAB's where local people could sit at a table with the Corps.

Dr. Sandifer, noting the emphasis in the *National Dialogue* brochure on community infrastructure, agreed with the idea of local advisory boards as an adjunct to existing partnering efforts where the partners plan projects jointly. These Boards could be useful in fixing overlooked environmental issues in projects nearing or past completion. Headquarters, he said, needs to recognize the excellent work being done by district planners, and demonstrate that environmental commitments made in the planning process will be carried out with no "unless we change our minds" phrasing in the project documents. He would like to see more partnering on the National level and with States. The 16 dialogue sessions the Corps held last year attracted 1,300 people. This, he suggested, is not a representative sample of the public. He would like to see members of the Corps present at meetings of environmental groups. (**LTG Flowers** committed the Corps to being present at any such meeting that wants Corps representation.)

Dr. Weinmann suggested that the Board meet where it can see major environmental projects such as the Everglades.

Ms. Wetherell said she would be interested in a meeting at the Waterways Experiment Station in Vicksburg, MS.

LTG Flowers pointed out that the Corps operates seven laboratories – four at WES plus the Construction Engineering Research Lab, Champaign, IL; the Cold Regions Research & Engineering Lab, Hanover, NH; and the Topographic Engineering Center, Fort Belvoir, VA. The idea of a meeting at a lab, he said, would be to give the Board an idea of applied research into areas such as dredged material, noxious weed control, bioremediation of hazardous and toxic sites, etc.

Dr. Johnson pointed out that the Yazoo Pumping Station, a large and controversial project, is about 20 minutes from WES, so a trip there could introduce the Board to the Corps R&D program and some specific project issues.

Dr. Hullar suggested that the Board receive background information and documents on a project before visiting it.

LTG Flowers pointed out that, while most Board discussion has centered on the Civil Works program, the Corps also has a large military environmental program. He cited the case of Cornhusker Army Ammunition Depot, in Nebraska, slated for closure under the BRAC program in 1995. Since Cornhusker's MACOM didn't have expertise in installation cleanup, the Corps took the installation over, cleaned it up and is handling its disposition. He pointed

out that the Army has a number of issues in its stewardship of military installations where the Corps can apply its expertise, as it can to other agencies. The Corps also has international missions in 93 countries. He noted the Board members were chosen for their diverse backgrounds in government, science or academia, and asked whether membership should be broadened to include representatives of activist groups. He himself has had mixed results in partnering with such groups. One group recently told him that it only wanted a relationship with the Corps if the Corps did only “natural things.” He noted that some conversations with representatives have ended up on the pages of the *Washington Post*.

Ms. Wetherell said State agencies have had similar experience with activist groups – some groups you can have dialogue with, others not. She suggested, however, that the Corps repeat its listening sessions with environmental groups to get views beyond those of the 1,300 people who attended the first series. She held such sessions in Florida, on a county-by-county basis in each of the State’s 67 counties. **LTG Flowers** suggested that this could be a good role for district-level EAB’s.

Dr. Donahue suggested that, although groups need not be represented on the Board *per se*, the Board should invite them to address it at public meetings.

Dr. Mount agreed that the Corps and the Board should not shut people out.

Ms. Chai pointed out the need to inform the public of the need for Corps projects – many who say they “don’t want dredging” are unaware of the critical role of navigation in the economy and the benefits provided. Environmentalists and others may be reminded of the benefits brought by agriculture, safety, recreation, etc., all of which are fostered by Corps projects. **LTG Flowers** agreed that the Corps often doesn’t tell its own story well, with the result that people often perceive it as having an “our way or no way” mentality. Ms. Chai would also like the EAB to serve as a communications vehicle for the public’s ideas. She would like to bring concerns and feedback of people with whom she has contact and know these points will be considered and possibly utilized. This two-way communication will help the Corps fulfill its six listed missions, including environmental resource management, and its allied water resources purposes, in a comprehensive and balanced way.

Dr. Weinmann said the Corps has to accept that there are people opposed to its mission, live with it, then use the best available science to make its decisions.

Dr. Hullar said that he, as an environmentalist, once suggested to a district commander that they switch roles at a meeting, with the commander giving an environmental speech and Dr. Hullar telling the Corps story. (The commander didn’t go for it.)

LTG Flowers thanked the Board for coming. He proposed the next Board meeting be held in Vicksburg, MS, in Oct 01, with visits to WES and the Yazoo Pumping Plant project. The Corps will come up with a list of other potential meeting sites and topics in the near future. Meanwhile, he suggested that if Board members want to visit Corps sites on their own, he will make Corps personnel available to brief them and show them around; or have a group tour organized.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Dr. Johnson pointed out that the time of the Board meeting was changed from that announced in the *Federal Register* to accommodate a change in schedule for a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee hearing where LTG Flowers was to testify. Future meetings, he said, will be held in places more easily accessible to the public.

Tom Chase, Director of Environmental Affairs, American Association of Port Authorities, said he looks forward to participating in Board meetings, noting that the Corps and the port community try to do the right thing for the environment. He pointed out that no other agency does what the Corps does for navigation or water infrastructure.

David Conrad, National Wildlife Federation, asked how the Corps will find a footing to move beyond protection into making restoration an integrated part of its water development mission, and learn how to do traditional water projects with more environmental sophistication. NWF, a grassroots coalition of local organizations with “a good ear to the ground,” looks forward to working with the Board, and likes the idea of the Board serving as a sounding board and bringing in outside views. The Board, he pointed out, needs to be informed on issues to give its best advice.

Dr. Johnson said the Corps challenge is to build environmentally sustainable projects – how do you make an inland waterway that’s actually good for its environment? He noted that the Corps wants to embrace public interest groups and other agencies – collaborative efforts produce more than the sum of individual ones.

4. There being no further comment, the meeting was adjourned at 1440 hours.

(This document was signed by the members electronically on various dates in May 2001)